

# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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Taken from *The Author of Sin*.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most popular but overrated objections against Christianity is the so-called "problem of evil." The objection claims that what Christianity affirms about God is logically irreconcilable with the existence of evil. Those who make this objection claim they know for certain that evil exists, and since this is incompatible with the Christian God, then it follows that there is no God, or it at least shows that what Christianity affirms about God is false.

Using the problem of evil, unbelievers have managed to confound more than a few professing Christians, and it seems that many of those who claim to be Christians are themselves disturbed by the existence of evil, or the amount of evil in this world. Some believers manage to provide plausible answers that are not altogether compelling, whereas many others simply call the existence of evil a mystery. However, to the extent that Scripture addresses the topic, so that it is something that has been revealed, Christians have no right to call it a mystery in the sense of something that is hidden. Just because we may not understand everything about the existence of evil does not mean that we must ignore what the Scripture plainly reveals about it.

On the other hand, merely plausible answers are insufficient when the Bible provides an infallible answer and an invincible defense. In what follows, we will see that the existence of evil poses no challenge to the Christian concept of God, or to any aspect of Christianity. Instead, it is the non-Christian worldviews that cannot make sense of the existence of evil, if they can have a concept of evil at all.

## **THE PROBLEM**

Christians affirm that God is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omnibenevolent (all-loving). Our opponents reason that if God is all-powerful, then he possesses the ability to terminate evil, and if he is all-loving, then he wishes to terminate evil;<sup>1</sup> however, since evil still exists, this means that God does not exist, or at least it means that the things that Christians affirm about him are false. That is, even if God exists, since evil also exists, he cannot be both all-powerful and all-loving, but Christians insist that he is both all-powerful and all-loving; therefore, Christianity must be false.

Those who use this argument against Christianity may formulate it in different ways, but regardless of the precise form that the argument takes, the point is that Christians cannot affirm all the biblical divine attributes, because to do so would be logically incompatible with the existence of evil. And if this is the case, then Christianity is false.

Although Christians have agonized over this so-called "problem of evil" for centuries, the argument is extremely easy to refute; it is one of the most stupid objections that I have ever seen, and even as a child I thought it was a foolish argument. Many people have

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the argument includes the fact that Christians affirm that God is also omniscient (all-knowing) – if God knows everything, then he knows how to destroy evil.

trouble with the existence of evil not because it poses any logical challenge to Christianity, but because they are overwhelmed by the emotions that the topic generates, and these strong emotions effectively disable the minimal level of judgment and intelligence that they normally exhibit.

Now, since the opponents of Christianity claim that the problem of evil is a *logical* argument against Christianity, in response we only need to show that the existence of evil does not *logically* contradict what Christianity teaches about God. Although Scripture also sufficiently answers the emotional aspects of this topic, it is not our responsibility to present and defend these answers within the context of logical debate. In fact, the emotional problems that people have with the existence of evil and their lack of answers to these problems are thoroughly consistent with what Scripture teaches. Thus we will focus on responding to the existence of evil as a logical challenge.

### **FREE WILL**

Many professing Christians favor the "free will defense" in answering the problem of evil. In the context of biblical narratives, this approach states that when God created man, he wanted to grant him free will – a power to make independent decisions, even to rebel against his maker. Of course, God was aware that man would sin, but this is the price of granting man free will. By creating man with free will, God also created the potential for evil, but as the free will defense goes, since man is truly free, the actualization of this potential for evil can be blamed only on man himself. Those who use the free will defense would add that the potential or even the actualization of evil is not too high a price for granting man genuine free will.

Although many professing Christians use the free will defense, and to some people the explanation may sound reasonable, it is an irrational and unbiblical theodicy – it fails to answer the problem of evil, and it contradicts Scripture. First, this approach only postpones addressing the problem, in that it transforms the debate from why evil exists in God's universe to why God created a universe with the potential for such great evil. Second, Christians affirm that God is omniscient, so that he did not create the universe and humankind realizing only that they had the potential to become evil; rather, he knew for certain that there would be evil. Thus either directly or indirectly, God created evil.<sup>2</sup>

We may distinguish between natural evil and moral evil – natural evil includes natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, whereas moral evil refers to the wicked actions that rational creatures commit. Now, even if the free will defense provides a satisfactory explanation for moral evil, it fails to adequately address natural evil. Some Christians may claim that it is moral evil that leads to natural evil; however, only God has the power to create a relationship between the two, so that earthquakes and floods do not have any necessary connections with murder and theft unless God makes it so – that is, unless God decides to cause earthquakes and floods because of murder and theft committed by his

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<sup>2</sup> The doctrine of "free will" is unbiblical and heretical, and some have even followed the doctrine to its next logical step in saying that if man were to be truly free, then God cannot really know for certain what man would do, thus denying the omniscience of God. But even then, God knew that it was possible for free will to produce extreme and horrendous evil, so that the same problem remains.

creatures. Thus God again appears to be the ultimate cause of evil, whether natural or moral.

Even if Adam's sin had brought death and decay, not only to mankind but also to the animals, Scripture insists that not one sparrow can die apart from God's will (Matthew 10:29). That is, if there is any connection between moral evil and natural evil, the connection is not inherent (as if anything is inherent apart from God's will), but rather sovereignly imposed by God. Even the seemingly insignificant cannot occur without, not merely the permission, but the active will and decree of God. Christians are not deists – we do not believe that this universe operates by a set of natural laws that are independent from God. The Bible shows us that God is now actively running the universe, so that nothing can happen or continue apart from God's active power and decree (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). If we should use the term at all, what we call "natural laws" are only descriptions about how God regularly acts, although he is by no means bound to act in those ways.

Christians must reject the free will defense simply because Scripture rejects free will; rather, Scripture teaches that God is the only one who possesses free will. He says in Isaiah 46:10, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." On the other hand, man's will is always enslaved either to sin or to righteousness: "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). Free will does not exist – it is a concept assumed by many professing Christians without biblical warrant.

Another popular assumption is that moral ability is the prerequisite of moral responsibility. In other words, the assumption is that if a person is unable to obey God's laws, then he should not be morally responsible for obeying these laws, and thus God should not and would not punish him for disobeying these laws. However, like the assumption that man has free will, this assumption that moral responsibility presupposes moral ability is also unbiblical and unjustified.

In reference to unbelievers, Paul writes, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). If it is true that moral responsibility presupposes moral ability, and Paul states that the sinner lacks this ability, then it follows that no sinner is responsible for his sins. That is, if a sinner is only a sinner if he has the ability to obey but refuses to obey, since Paul says that the sinner indeed lacks the ability to obey, then it follows that a sinner is not a sinner. However, this is a contradiction, and it is a contradiction that the Bible never teaches.

The Bible teaches that the non-Christian is a sinner, and at the same time teaches that he lacks the ability to obey God. This means that man is morally responsible even if he lacks moral ability; that is, man must obey God even if he cannot obey God. It is sinful for a person to disobey God whether or not he has the ability to do otherwise. Thus moral responsibility is not grounded on moral ability or on free will; rather, moral responsibility

is grounded on God's sovereignty – man must obey God's commands because God says that man must obey, and whether or not he has the ability to obey is irrelevant.

In the first place, free will is logically impossible. If we picture the exercise of the will as a movement of the mind toward a certain direction, the question arises as to what moves the mind, and why it moves toward where it moves. To answer that the "self" moves the mind begs the question, since the mind *is* the self, and thus the same question remains.

Why does the mind move toward one direction instead of another? If we can trace the cause of its movement and direction to factors external to the mind itself, factors that impress themselves upon the consciousness from the outside and thus influencing or determining the decision, then how is this movement of the mind free? If we can trace the cause to the person's innate dispositions, then this movement of the will is still not free, since although these innate dispositions decisively influence the decision, the person himself has not freely chosen these innate dispositions in the first place.

The same problem remains if we say that a person's decisions are determined by a mixture of his innate dispositions and external influences. If the mind makes decisions based on factors not chosen by the mind, then these choices are never free in the sense that they are not made apart from God's sovereign control – they are not made free from God. Scripture teaches that God not only exercises immediate control over man's mind, but God also sovereignly determines all the innate dispositions and external factors related to man's will. It is God who forms a person in the womb, and it is he who arranges outward circumstances by his providence.

Therefore, although we may affirm that man has a will as a function of the mind, so that the mind indeed makes choices, these are never free choices, because everything that has to do with every decision is determined by God. Since the will is never free, we should never use the free will theodicy when addressing the problem of evil.

### **GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY**

Many professing Christians are uncomfortable with the biblical teaching that man has no free will, since it appears to make God "responsible" for the existence and continuation of evil. So in this section, we will provide a brief exposition on what Scripture teaches on the topic, showing that to affirm Scripture is to reject free will.

Scripture teaches that God's will determines everything. Nothing exists or happens without God, not merely permitting, but actively willing it to exist or happen:

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. (Isaiah 46:10)

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. (Matthew 10:29)

God controls not only natural events, but he also controls all human affairs and decisions:

Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts!  
We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple. (Psalm 65:4)

The LORD works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster. (Proverbs 16:4)

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way? (Proverbs 20:24)

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. (Proverbs 21:1)

Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. (Job 14:5)

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35)

But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. (Acts 18:21)

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13)

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Revelation 4:11)

If God indeed determines all natural events and human affairs, then it follows that he has also decreed the existence of evil. This is what the Bible explicitly teaches:

The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11)

Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? (Lamentations 3:37-38)

I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7)

When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? (Amos 3:6)

The greatest act of moral evil and injustice in human history is said to have been actively performed by God through secondary agents:

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. (Isaiah 53:10)

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:27-28)

In any case, God decreed the death of Christ for a good reason, namely, the redemption of his elect. Likewise, his decree for the existence of evil is for the worthy purpose of his glory. The elect and reprobates are both created for this reason:

I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD... (Exodus 14:4)



For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory... (Romans 9:17, 22-23)

Based on the above passages, we come to the following conclusion. God controls everything that is and everything that happens. There is not one thing that happens that he has not actively decreed – not even a single thought in the mind of man. Since this is true, it follows that God has decreed the existence of evil, he has not merely permitted it, as if anything can originate and happen apart from his will and power. Since we have shown that no creature can make completely independent decisions, evil could never have started without God's active decree, and it cannot continue for one moment longer apart from God's will. God decreed evil ultimately for his own glory, although it is not necessary to know or to state this reason to defend Christianity from the problem of evil.

Those who see that it is impossible to altogether disassociate God from the origination and continuation of evil nevertheless try to distance God from evil by saying that God merely "permits" evil, and that he does not cause any of it. However, since Scripture itself states that God actively decrees everything, and that nothing can happen apart from his will and power, it makes no sense to say that he merely permits something – nothing happens by God's mere permission.

Since "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), on a metaphysical level, it is impossible to do anything at all in independence from God. Without him, a person cannot even think or move. How, then, can evil be devised and committed in total independence from him? How can one even think evil apart from God's will and purpose? Instead of trying to "protect" God from something that he does not need protection from, we should happily acknowledge with the Bible that God has actively decreed evil, and then deal with the topic on this basis.

The census of Israel taken by David provides an example of evil decreed by God and performed through secondary agents:

Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah." (2 Samuel 24:1)

Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

The two verses refer to the same incident. There is no contradiction if the view being presented here is true. God decreed that David would sin by taking the census, but he

caused Satan to perform the temptation as a secondary agent.<sup>3</sup> Afterward, God punished David for committing this sin:

David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing." Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me." David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men." (2 Samuel 24:10-14)

Although the evil we are speaking of is indeed negative, the ultimate end, which is the glory of God, is positive. God is the only one who possesses intrinsic worth, and if he decides that the existence of evil will ultimately serve to glorify him, then the decree is by definition good and justified. One who thinks that God's glory is not worth the death and suffering of billions of people has too high an opinion of himself and humanity. A creature's worth can only be derived from and given by his creator, and in light of the purpose for which the creator made him. Since God is the sole standard of measurement, if he thinks something is justified, then it is by definition justified. Christians should have no trouble affirming all of this, and those who find it difficult to accept what Scripture explicitly teaches should reconsider their spiritual commitment, to see if they are truly in the faith.

Many people will challenge God's right and justice in decreeing the existence of evil for his own glory and purpose. In discussing divine election, in which God chooses some for salvation and condemns all others, Paul anticipates a similar objection, and writes:

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:19-21)

In effect, Paul is saying, "Of course the creator has the right to do whatever he wants with his creatures. And who are you to make such an objection in the first place?" Some people object that man is greater than a "lump of clay"; I have even seen one professing

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<sup>3</sup> Satan himself is a creature, and thus has no free will. All his actions and decisions are controlled by God.

Christian writer make this futile objection. First, this is a biblical analogy, and a true Christian will not challenge it. But if one challenges it, then the debate becomes one of biblical infallibility, which must be settled first before returning to this analogy. Since I have established biblical infallibility elsewhere, denying biblical infallibility is not an option here. Second, if man is more than a lump of clay, then God is also more than a potter – he is infinitely greater than a potter. The analogy is proper when we understand it to say what it means, that is, God as creator has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creatures. "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).

For a person to have difficulty accepting that God would decree the existence of evil implies that he finds something "wrong" with God making such a decree. However, what is the standard of right and wrong by which this person judges God's actions? If there is a moral standard superior to God, to which God himself is accountable and by which God himself is judged, then this "God" is not God at all; rather, this higher standard would be God. However, the Christian concept of God refers to the highest being and standard, so there is by definition nothing higher. In other words, if there is something higher than the "God" that a person is arguing against, then this person is not really referring to the Christian God. Since this is the case, there is no standard higher than God to which God himself is accountable and by which God himself is judged. Therefore, it is logically impossible to accuse God of doing anything morally wrong.

Jesus says that only God is good (Luke 18:19), so that all "goodness" in other things can only be derivative. God's nature defines goodness itself, and since he "does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17), he is the sole and constant standard of goodness. No matter how moral I am, one cannot consider me the objective standard of goodness, since even the word "moral" is meaningless unless it is used relative to God's character. That is, how "moral" a person is refers to the degree of conformity of his character to God's character. To the degree that a person thinks and acts in accordance with God's nature and commands, he is moral. Otherwise, there is no moral difference between altruism and selfishness; virtue and vice are meaningless concepts; rape and murder are not crimes, but amoral events.

However, since God calls himself good, and since God has defined goodness for us by revealing his nature and commands, evil is thus defined as anything that is contrary to his nature and commands. Since God is good, and since he is the only definition of goodness, it is also good that he decreed the existence of evil. There is no standard of good and evil by which we can denounce his decree as wrong or evil. We are not affirming that evil is good – that would be a contradiction – but we are saying that God's decree for the existence of evil is good.

Hebrews 6:13 says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." In other words, there is no one to hold God accountable, and there is no court to which one may drag him in order to press charges against him. No one judges God; rather, every person is judged by him. Other relevant biblical passages include the following:

Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him. If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, "What are you doing?" (Job 9:3-12)

"Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" Then Job answered the LORD: "I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more." Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (Job 40:2-8)

Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?" Does your work say, "He has no hands?" Woe to him who says to his father, "What have you begotten?" or to his mother, "What have you brought to birth?" This is what the LORD says – the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? (Isaiah 45:9-11)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

Since we derive our very concept and definition of goodness from God, to accuse him of evil would be like saying that good is evil, which is a contradiction.

## THE SOLUTION

Having demolished the popular but irrational and unbiblical free will defense, we will now examine the biblical answer to the problem of evil. Let us first repeat the unbeliever's argument:

1. The Christian God is all-powerful and all-loving.
2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.
4. But evil still exists.
5. Therefore, the Christian God does not exist.<sup>4</sup>

The argument encounters an insuperable obstacle by the time we reach premise (3), namely, the non-Christian cannot find a definition of love that upholds this premise without destroying the argument. That is, by what definition of love do we know that an all-loving God would want to destroy evil? Or, by what definition of love do we know that an all-loving God would have already destroyed evil?

If this definition of love comes from outside of the Bible, then why must the biblical worldview answer to it? To form an argument using a non-biblical definition of love would make the argument irrelevant as a challenge to Christianity. On the other hand, if we take the definition of love from the Bible, then the one who uses this argument must show that the Bible itself defines love in a way that requires an all-loving God to destroy evil, or to have already destroyed evil. Unless the non-Christian can successfully defend premise (3), the argument from the problem of evil fails before we even finish reading it.

Now, if the non-Christian uses a non-biblical definition of love in premise (1), then the argument is a straw man fallacy from the start. But if the non-Christian uses the biblical definition of love in premise (1), and then substitutes a non-biblical definition of love in premise (3), then he commits the fallacy of equivocation. If so, then the most that his argument accomplishes is to point out that he has a non-biblical definition of love, but it would be completely irrelevant as a challenge to Christianity.

On the other hand, if he tries to use the biblical definition of love, then for his argument to be relevant, Scripture itself would have to define love in a way that requires God to destroy evil, or to have already destroyed evil. However, although Scripture teaches that God is loving, it also teaches that there is evil in this world, and that this evil is ultimately under God's complete and sovereign control. Therefore, Scripture itself denies that there is any contradiction between the love of God and the existence of evil.

For the argument from the problem of evil to stand, the non-Christian must establish the premise, "The love of God contradicts the existence of evil," or something to that effect. But Scripture itself does not affirm this premise, and if the non-Christian tries to argue for this premise with definitions of love and evil found in his own non-biblical worldview, then all he succeeds in showing is that the biblical worldview is different from the non-

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, different people may present different formulations of the problem of evil, but my refutation will apply to all of them.

biblical worldview. We already know this, but what has become of the problem of evil? The non-Christian points to the scriptural teaching about God's love, then smuggles in a non-biblical definition of love that requires God to destroy evil, and after that stupidly boasts in the "contradiction" that he has produced.

If a person wants to challenge the Bible or hold the Bible accountable for what it says, then he must first let it define its own terms; otherwise, he might be only challenging what the Bible does *not* say, which makes the objection irrelevant. The non-Christian must demonstrate why God's love *necessarily* implies that he must or that he desires to destroy evil, or that it *necessarily* implies that he must have or that he desires to have already destroyed evil.

To answer with something like, "Because a loving God would want to relieve suffering," does not help at all, since it only restates the premise in different words, so that the same question remains. Why must a loving God desire to relieve suffering? How does one define suffering in the first place? If the non-Christian cannot define either love or suffering, or if he cannot logically impose his definitions on the Christian, then his premise amounts to saying that a God with an undefined attribute X must desire to destroy or to have destroyed an undefined Y. But if he can define neither X nor Y, then he has no intelligible premise from which to construct an intelligible argument against Christianity.

Another type of answer may say, "Because God would want to triumph over evil." Again, what is the definition of "triumph"? If God himself is the ultimate cause of evil, and if God exercises total and constant control over it, then in what sense is he *ever* "losing" to evil? So whatever the non-Christian says, he encounters the same problem, and it is impossible for him to establish that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil.

Rather, since the Bible teaches about both the love of God and the reality of suffering, it is legitimate to conclude that, from the biblical perspective, the love of God does not necessarily imply that he must destroy evil, or that he must have already destroyed it. Of course this may not be so from the non-biblical perspective, but again, this only shows that the biblical worldview disagrees with non-biblical worldviews, which we already know, and which is the reason for debate. But the non-Christian still has not given us a real and intelligible objection.

As long as the non-Christian fails to establish premise (3), that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil, the Christian is under no obligation to take seriously the problem of evil as an argument against Christianity. In fact, since the non-Christian fails to define some of the key terms, logically no one can even understand the argument – there is no argument, and there is no real objection to answer.

If we stop here, we will have already refuted the so-called problem of evil, having shown that there is no such problem at all. However, just so the discussion can continue, we will grant the premise for now; that is, for the sake of argument, we will assume that the love

of God *somehow* contradicts the existence of evil, while keeping in mind that this is something that Scripture never teaches, and that non-Christians have never established.

Now, the non-Christian argues that given the existence of evil, the Christian God cannot logically exist. In response, we have already shown that the non-Christian cannot establish the premise that an all-loving God must necessarily destroy evil or desire to destroy evil. Having said that, we now proceed to point out that the premises of the argument do not *necessarily* lead to the non-Christian's conclusion in the first place; rather, very different conclusions are possible:

1. The Christian God is all-powerful and all-loving.
2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.
4. But evil still exists.
5. Therefore, *God has a good purpose for evil.*

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2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.
4. But evil still exists.
5. Therefore, *God will eventually destroy evil.*

Without immediately stating whether or not we think the above two arguments are valid or invalid, the point is that in a valid argument, the premises must *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the conclusion. However, in the argument from the problem of evil, the premises by no means *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the conclusion. Therefore, the argument from the problem of evil is invalid.

Instead of using the reality of evil to deny the existence of God, the two revised versions above come to two different conclusions. Again, I have not said whether these two revised versions are good arguments, and I have not said that the premises necessarily and inevitably lead to these two conclusions; rather, all I am trying to show is that the premises do not necessarily and inevitably lead to the non-Christian's conclusion, and this is enough to show that his argument is invalid.

Some non-Christians say that if Christians claims that God has a good purpose for evil, then Christians must also state and defend this purpose. However, the non-Christians have never been able to show *why* the Christians must state and defend this purpose. The debate is about whether the given premises *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the non-Christian's conclusion. Whether or not there is a good purpose for evil, and whether or not the Christians can state and defend this purpose, is completely irrelevant. As it is, Scripture indeed explains at least part of God's purpose for evil, but again, it is not logically necessarily or relevant to the debate.

There is more. Now, the non-Christian argues that God does not exist because evil exists, and by this point we have already refuted the argument. However, we can add that the

existence of the Christian God is in fact the logical prerequisite for the existence of evil. That is, evil is meaningless and undefined without an objective and absolute standard of right and wrong, good and evil, and this standard can only be the Christian God.

When the non-Christian states that evil exists, what does he mean by "evil"? He may be referring to greed, hate, murder, rape, earthquakes, floods and the like. However, on what basis and by what standard does he call these things evil? Does he call these things evil just because he disapproves of them? Any definition or standard of evil that he gives without appealing to the Christian God and the Christian Scripture will be unsuccessful and easily defeated.

For example, if the non-Christian claims that murder is wrong because it violates the right to life of the victim, we only need to ask why the victim has any right to life? Who gives him this so-called right? The non-Christian? Who says that there is anything as a right in the first place? Non-Christians have tried many arguments, but all of them have been exposed as foolish and unjustified.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the Christian affirms that murder is wrong, immoral, and evil because God forbids murder: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6); God explicitly disallows it when he says, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). It is consistent with the Christian worldview to say that murder is evil and that the murderer must be held accountable, but the non-Christian can never justify the same claim. He cannot even *authoritatively* define murder.<sup>6</sup>

The non-Christian claims that evil exists, and from that basis evaluates what Christianity says about God. He uses something that he claims to be obvious to refute something that he claims to be unobvious. However, the existence of evil is not obvious at all unless there is an absolute, objective, and universal moral standard, and that we somehow know this standard, so that we make evaluations with it. Since the non-Christian fails to establish such a standard, and since he fails to establish how he would know such a standard, his references to evil are meaningless and unintelligible, and his argument from the problem of evil has no effect against Christianity. In fact, on the basis of his worldview, he does not even know what his own argument means.

If a person denies the existence of God, he has no rational basis to affirm the existence of evil; by logical necessity, our recognition of God precedes our recognition of evil. Unless the Christian God is presupposed, evil remains undefined. When the non-Christian argues against Christianity using the problem of evil, he becomes an intellectual terrorist, so that he hijacks the moral absolute of Christianity in the process of arguing against Christianity. However, he cannot refer to any natural or moral evil without implicitly

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, please see my writings on apologetics and ethics.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the non-Christian can never justify defining murder to include the killing of humans but exclude the killing of bacteria. Of course, some advocates of animal rights consider it murder to slaughter animals, but not bacteria; however, they can never justify the inclusion of animals or the exclusion of bacteria.



acknowledging a standard by which to judge something as evil. If he acknowledges the existence of evil, then he must first acknowledge the existence of God, but if he already acknowledges the existence of God, then the argument from the problem of evil is pointless.

Of course, the non-Christian may not immediately surrender at this point; rather, he will probably try to offer some workable definition of evil to rescue his argument. I cannot list all the possible definitions that he may try to propose, but I have provided enough information here so that anyone can refute any non-Christian definition proposed. If the Christian will consistently demand justification for the non-Christian's claims and definitions, he will always successfully frustrate any attempt to construct an argument against Christianity from the existence of evil.<sup>7</sup>

Some non-Christians have come to realize that the argument from the problem of evil is not strictly valid, so that although they continue to challenge Christianity based on the existence of evil, they have "softened" their claim. That is, they say that although the existence of evil does not logically contradict the existence of God, the existence of evil at least provides strong evidence against God's existence, or the probability of God's existence. Thus instead of calling their argument a logical case against God's existence, they call it an evidential case against God's existence.<sup>8</sup>

But this is nonsense – it is just a deceptive way of saying that they have no argument. In fact, all the problems that I have pointed out with the "logical" case remain in the "evidential" case. The argument still fails to establish that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil, or that the love of God requires him to destroy evil, or to have destroyed evil. It still fails to define the crucial terms. What is love? What is evil? In fact, the argument makes matters worse by adding the concept of "evidence" to the debate, since now I demand at least several additional things: a definition of evidence, a standard for determining what constitutes evidence toward or against something, a standard for determining the relevance and force of any alleged evidence, and an epistemology for discovering the things that are used as evidence.

Along with the "evidential" case, some people include the claim that there is too much "gratuitous" evil, and that this is evidence against God's existence. But again, what is evidence? And who decides what is "gratuitous"?<sup>9</sup> By what standard of necessity do we

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<sup>7</sup> The argument will ultimately become a broad presuppositional debate. For more information on this, see my *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

<sup>8</sup> Some people use different terms to make this same distinction.

<sup>9</sup> On this point, even some professional philosophers stoop to an appeal of popular opinion. That is, they claim that "everybody knows" that certain things are evil, and that certain things are gratuitous evil. In another context, these same philosophers would probably blast such an appeal to popular opinion to establish a pivotal premise -- that they resort to this tactic here shows me that they are stupid and desperate. The most obvious response is that it is fallacious to think that something is true just because many or even most people think that it is true.

Some philosophers argue that if most people think that there is gratuitous evil, then the burden of proof falls on the Christian to show that there is no gratuitous evil. Although I disagree that the burden of proof falls on me just because I contradict popular opinion, even if it does, I have shown that any evil that God

decide that an evil event is unnecessary? And unnecessary for what? And why does it have to be necessary in the first place? In the biblical worldview, when God does something, it is justified by definition just because he has decided to do it. Thus the non-Christian cannot argue against Christianity by appealing to "unjustified" events, since he must first refute Christianity before he can show that these events are unjustified.

## **OTHER WORLDVIEWS**

There is no reason for lengthy explanations or needless repetitions, since the matter is indeed as simple as it appears. The argument from the problem of evil *in any form* is one of the most irrational arguments ever devised, but it has deceived and troubled many people because of its emotional appeal. In response, the Christian must not only neutralize the argument, but he must take the offensive position on this topic against the non-Christian.

Perhaps because the problem of evil is most often used to challenge Christianity, many people forget to consider whether non-Christian worldviews and religions have adequate and coherent answers about the existence of evil. Can non-Christians provide an authoritative definition of evil? Does their definition of evil contradict what they claim about physics (natural evil) and psychology (moral evil)? Can they explain how and why evil began and continues? Can they suggest a solution for evil, and can they guarantee that this solution will succeed? No worldview except the Christian faith can even begin to answer these questions.

Next time a non-Christian challenges you with the problem of evil, instead of being pressed into a corner, you should be able to give an irrefutable answer, but then you should take the offensive and turn the argument against the non-Christian (2 Corinthians 10:5):

"I am able to show that the existence of evil does not contradict the love of God or the existence of God. In fact, the very concept of evil presupposes the existence of the Christian God. This God decreed the existence of evil for his own glory, and every aspect and instance of evil is under his precise control, and there is no standard higher than God to judge this decree as wrong. One day

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decrees is justified by definition, so that the burden of proof returns to the non-Christian, who must either refute this particular point or refute Christianity as a whole, and thus the focus of the debate shifts to a presuppositional one (see my *Presuppositional Confrontations*).

Moreover, even if the appeal to popular opinion is legitimate (although I deny this), I demand proof that it is indeed the popular opinion that there is gratuitous evil. How can the non-Christian establish this claim? Even if he can perform a global empirical survey, I have already refuted empiricism elsewhere. In addition, I demand justification that he should limit his survey to only the present generation. If he cannot do this, then he must also show that since the origin of mankind, it has been the popular opinion that there is gratuitous evil. He must also prove that this will continue to be the popular opinion in all future generations. If he fails to do this, then I have no reason to accept his claim that "everybody knows" there is evil, or gratuitous evil. He thinks that "everybody knows," but he does not know that "everybody knows"; it is his singular opinion about popular opinion.

he will banish all sinners to endless torment in hell, so that every instance of murder, theft, rape, and even every word that a man has spoken, will be accounted for. He will thus justly punish all sinners who have not trusted Christ for salvation, but his chosen ones will surely be saved.

"But how do you deal with evil? Given your worldview, how can you even have a meaningful and universal concept of evil? How do you explain its origin and continuation? Can you offer an effective or even guaranteed solution to defeat evil? Can you set forth universally applicable and binding reasons against such things as genocide and racism? How can your worldview make moral demands on someone that does not subscribe to it? Given your worldview, is there final and perfect justice for anyone? If not, what is your solution or explanation for that? How can you define justice in the first place? Why must a person from another nation or culture recognize your so-called rights?

"If you cannot give adequate answers to these and thousands of other questions on the basis of your worldview and intellectual commitments without self-contradiction, then it is evident that the existence of evil means the destruction of your worldview, whereas it poses no threat at all to mine. You are a hypocrite for even mentioning the problem as an objection to Christianity"

Although many people are fond of challenging Christians with the problem of evil, the truth is that Christianity is the only worldview in which the existence of evil does not create a logical problem. Nevertheless, many professing Christians are intimidated by non-Christian arguments. This is partly because they have not learned the logical refutations to these arguments, but also because they sometimes partly agree with the non-Christians, at least on the emotional level. But of course, just because something causes an emotional disturbance in some people does nothing to challenge the Christian faith itself.

Now, if the non-Christian is so disturbed over the existence of evil he can always ask a Christian on how to depend on Christ for salvation; otherwise he can commit himself to a psychiatric ward where he may remain miserable under professional care. As for Christians, Scripture provides the solution: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3). Psalm 73:16-17 says, "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny." Only by accepting the Christian worldview can a person come to a rational position about the existence of evil, and only by entering "the sanctuary of God," can the topic cease to be "oppressive." Only those who draw close to God can sufficiently understand the reality of evil and retain emotional stability. The Christian faith is true and is the only way to God and salvation. It is immune to intellectual attacks. It cannot be successfully challenged, but only studied and obeyed.